

trees, ruined buildings, American Gothic motifs indicating the various buildings of the town.

The lighting, especially if a bare stage or platforms are used, might be considered the most important single scenic element. In this edition—to assist the readers in *seeing* the play—it has been indicated at the beginning of each scene where the conversations take place. Some are quite obvious: scenes in the café, court, or church. Others, such as "A street in town," a director might wish to place elsewhere; they should be thought of only as suggestions to aid in following the printed text of the play. A scene continues—sometimes two or more in separate areas of the stage simultaneously—until the lights dim on the scene and focus attention elsewhere.

THE RIMERS OF ELDRITCH

ACT ONE

In darkness, WILMA and MARTHA on the porch of MARTHA's house.

WILMA. Well, what I heard isn't fit for talk, but I heard that Mrs. Cora Groves, up on the highway . . . ?

MARTHA. Yes.

WILMA. . . . has taken a boy, she's old enough to be his mother on, and is keeping him up there in her café.

MARTHA. In her bed.

WILMA [with true sympathy]. That woman went crazy when her husband left her.

MARTHA. Oh, I know she did.

WILMA. That woman, I swear, isn't responsible for her own actions.

A very faint light begins to illuminate the courtroom, NELLY standing, her hand raised.

MARTHA. I should say she isn't.

WILMA. I hear he does things around the café, whistling around like he belonged there.

MARTHA. Have you ever heard anything like it?

WILMA. I haven't, I swear to God.

A sharp increase in the lights.

In the courtroom.

NELLY. I do.

MARTHA's porch—morning.

MARTHA. Why, she called Evelyn Jackson a liar to her face, and Eva too. Swore things the devil and his angels wouldn't believe it. She'd stand up there and swear black was white.

WILMA. And Nelly, poor woman, the life that woman leads. Only God in His Heaven knows the trials that woman has to bear.

MARTHA. That she should have to be dragged through this.

WILMA. She stood there and told the way it was; I said to Mrs. Jackson—cried the whole time—

MARTHA.—I know, I saw.

WILMA. —Only God in Heaven knows the trials that poor woman has had to bear.

In the courtroom.

JUDGE. Nelly Windrod, do you solemnly swear to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—

NELLY [quietly troubled]. I do, yes.

JUDGE. —so help you God?

NELLY. I do.

JUDGE [exactly as before]. Nelly Windrod, do you solemnly swear to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—

NELLY. I do, yes.

JUDGE. —so help you God?

NELLY. I do.

MARTHA's porch—night.

MARTHA. So help me God I don't know how we let him hang around here like he did. Not talking to nobody.

WILMA. Nobody I know of could live like that.

MARTHA. Like that time he scared young Patsy so bad.

WILMA. Bad for the whole town with someone like that.

MARTHA. Like that way he had of just standing around.

WILMA. Around here everybody knows everybody.

MARTHA. Everybody was scared of him. Everybody knew what he was.

WILMA. A fool like that.

MARTHA. Grumbling and mumbling around; standing and watching it all.

WILMA. I'd think people'd feel easier now. I know I swear I do.

MARTHA. I do.

In the courtroom.

NELLY. I do.

Beat.

JUDGE [faintly, fading]. Now, Miss Windrod, if you would tell the court, in your own words . . .

In the grocery where ROBERT works.

MARY [to ROBERT]. Now, we have to understand that Nelly is my flesh and blood.

ROBERT. I know.

MARY. Yes, love, she's my flesh and blood and she thinks she knows but she doesn't know but she thinks she does.

ROBERT. I suppose she does if anybody does.

MARY. Well, she thinks she does. But I know and you know. I was at my window, watching the moon.

ROBERT. Was there a moon?

MARY. I said to those people, all those new people in town—there isn't much to know about Eldritch, used to be Elvin Eldritch's pasture till it gave out I guess and they found coal. It was built on coal with coal money and deserted when the coal gave out and here it stands, this wicked old town. All the buildings bowing and nodding.

ROBERT. How do you know so much?

MARY. And still so little? I would puzzle that if I could. I told them none of the people here now were coal people. The mining people moved off; they raped the land and moved away. There used to be explosives that rattled the windows, oh my, and shook the water in a bucket, day and night.

ROBERT. How come you remember so much?

MARY. And still so little? The last time I saw you, why, you was just a little baby; you've grown up so.

ROBERT. You saw me yesterday, Mrs. Windrod.

MARY. You don't know. Isn't that sweet. The last time I saw you, why, you weren't no bigger than that high.

ROBERT. You've known me all my—

MARY. You've grown up so. I have terrible bruises on my arm there. Look at that.

CORA's café. WALTER is sitting at the counter.

TRUCKER [leaving]. I'll see you, Cora.

CORA. Can't avoid it, I guess. You watch it now on those narrow roads.

TRUCKER. It's push-pull with the load; I'll come back through empty day after tomorrow—you remember to tell me that again.

CORA. Stay awake now.

TRUCKER. No danger of that.

On the porch.

WILMA. I'll say one thing for her. How long has it been he's been there?

CORA [to WALTER]. Boy.

MARTHA. Two or three months now nearly. Walks around the place whistling like he owned it.

WILMA. Well, he earns his keep.

CORA. Boy.

MARTHA. It's not in the kitchen that he earns his keep, Wilma.

CORA. Boy.

WILMA. Well, I'll say one thing—

CORA.—I'm getting ready to close up now.

WILMA.—Whatever it is, she looks a darn sight better now than she did a year ago. Since I can remember.

CORA. Boy.

WALTER [as though waking from a daydream]. I'm sorry.

CORA. I'm fixing to close up. You sleeping?

WALTER. Thinking, I guess.

CORA. Have another cup of coffee, I got time.

MARTHA. That woman isn't responsible for her own actions since her husband left her.

WALTER. Swell.

WILMA. It's not for us to judge.

MARTHA. That's all well and good but anyone who deliberately cuts herself off from everybody else in town.

WILMA. I don't judge, but I know who I speak to on the street and who I don't.

WALTER. Is there work here in town do you know?

CORA. Down in Eldritch? Not if you're looking for wages. Not here.

MARTHA. It's easy to see the devil's work.

WALTER. I had that in mind.

CORA. You might try Centerville; Eldritch is all but a ghost town.

WALTER. You here alone?

CORA. I've managed for seven years; it hasn't bothered me.

WALTER. It might not be a bad idea to take someone on yourself.

WILMA. It's a sin to sashay through Centerville the way she does, buying that boy shirts and new clothes. Keeping him up on the highway.

MARTHA. I don't go, but I understand he's made a show place out of her café.

WILMA. I'd be happier if it was me if they made her close it down.

MARTHA. It ought to be against the law serving beer to truck drivers and them having to be on the road so much.

WILMA. The wages of sin lead to death.

CORA. Aren't you cold in just that jacket; that's pretty light for April.

WALTER. No, it's not bad.

They regard each other a moment; the light fades on the café.

MARTHA. The wages of sin is death.

WILMA. Bless her heart, poor old thing.

MARTHA [as MARY WINDROD passes the porch]. Good evening, Mary.

WILMA. Good evening, Mary Windrod.

MARY [stopping]. You two. I watch you two sometimes.

MARY talks, almost with everything she says, as though she were describing a beautiful dream to a pet canary.

WILMA. Aren't you cold in that shawl, dear?

MARTHA. Nights are cold in this valley for June.

MARY. It's not bad.

WILMA. You'll be catching a chill next.

MARY. I was once a nurse and I believe that the constant proximity to sickness has given me an immunity to night air.

MARTHA. Never think that.

MARY. Us dry old women rattle like paper; we couldn't get sick. I listen to you old women sometimes.

WILMA. How's your daughter?

MARY. Yes, indeed.

MARTHA. I beg your pardon?

MARY. The proximity to all that sickness.

WILMA. Yes, love.

MARY. Immunity to death myself. My number passed Gabriel right on by. It came up and passed right on by and here I am a forgotten child.

WILMA. You better get inside, love.

MARY. Rusting away, flaking away.

MARTHA. You get in, now.

MARY [leaving]. This wicked town. God hear a dried-up woman's prayer and do not forgive this wicked town!

The CONGREGATION bursts into "Shall We Gather at the River"; after only a few bars, the song stops abruptly.

In the courtroom.

NELLY. And Mama came running downstairs and said a man had attacked young Eva Jackson.

JUDGE. Would you point out Eva . . . ?

NELLY [as the light fades]. There, poor lamb, can't hardly speak two words since this thing happened and I don't wonder—

On the porch.

WILMA [overlapping a word or two]. Well, I know I swear I don't know what he sees in her.

MARTHA. It's nice of him, though.

WILMA. Well, I know but Driver Junior's old enough to be taking girls out; he shouldn't be wandering around with her.

MARTHA. It's nice to have somebody to keep her company. Still and all, it doesn't seem natural, I know what you mean.

WILMA. I don't know what he sees in her.

MARTHA. Poor thing.

Near Eva's house.

ROBERT. Eva!

EVA. Are you glad to be out of school?

ROBERT. I liked it all right.

EVA. What are you going to be?

ROBERT. Who knows?

EVA. We had our Eighth Grade graduation in robes! I bet I know what you won't be, don't I?

ROBERT. What's that?

EVA. A race car driver.

ROBERT. Why do you want to say that? You think I couldn't do that if I wanted to?

EVA. You don't want to get yourself killed.

ROBERT. Driver didn't want it; he just had an accident.

EVA. You want to be like him?

ROBERT. People don't want to do the same thing their brother did; I couldn't see any sense in it.

EVA. I knew you didn't. You aren't going to get yourself killed.

ROBERT. Killed doesn't have anything to do with it. Eva, good Lord, I don't want people carrying on like that; honking their horns, coming into town every week like a parade. I never even went to see Driver.

EVA. You decided what you want to be?

ROBERT. I don't have to decide this minute, do I?

EVA. I just wondered.

ROBERT. Do you know? You don't know what you want.

EVA. Of course I know; you know, I told you. So do you know, everybody knows what they want—it's what they think they really can do that they don't know.

ROBERT. Well, I don't have to decide yet.

EVA [in a sudden burst, as though conjuring]. When's it gonna be autumn? I love autumn so much I could hug it. I want it to be autumn. That's what I want right now. Now! Autumn! Now!

ROBERT. Good luck; I don't see it.

EVA [in a burst]. Don't you be derisive to me, Driver Junior!

ROBERT. Don't call me that.

EVA. Well, don't you go on, Robert Conklin, or I'll call you anything I like.

ROBERT. You'll be talking to yourself.

EVA. Everybody else calls you that. Don't go away; I won't, I promise. Don't you wish it was autumn? Don't you? Don't you love autumn? And the wind and rime and pumpkins and gourds and corn shocks? I won't again. Don't you love autumn? Don't

you, Robert? I won't call you that. Everybody else does but I won't.

ROBERT. I haven't thought about it.

EVA. Well, think about it, right now. Think about how it smells.

ROBERT. How does it smell?

EVA. Like dry, windy, cold, frosty rime and chaff and leaf smoke and corn husks.

ROBERT. It does, huh?

EVA. Pretend. Close your eyes—are your eyes closed? Don't you wish it was here? Like apples and cider. You go.

ROBERT. And rain.

EVA. Sometimes. And potatoes and flower seeds and honey.

ROBERT. And popcorn and butter.

EVA [opening her eyes]. Yes. Oh, it does not! You're not playing at all. There's hay and clover and alfalfa and all that. [Hitting him, really quite hard, slapping.]

ROBERT [laughing]. Come on, it's different for everybody.

EVA. Well, that's not right; it doesn't at all. Are you making fun?

ROBERT. Come on, don't be rough.

EVA. I will too; you're not the least bit funny, Driver Junior! [As he starts to walk on.] Come back here, Robert! Robert Conklin. Driver Junior! Little brother. Your brother was a man, anyway. Coward. Robert? Bobby?

In the store.

WILMA. And I'll have some flour and yeast. And three packs of Sure-jell.

ROBERT. Right you are. How much flour?

WILMA. No more than five pounds in this weather. How're you doing in school?

ROBERT. All right.

WILMA. I just said to Martha Truit, I suppose Driver Junior will be leaving us as soon as school gets out next month, like all the young kids now.

ROBERT. Not for a while yet.

WILMA. Oh, you will; you'll be going off to see the world.

ROBERT. I don't know.

WILMA. There's nothing for a strong young man in this dead old town. Where do you think you'll be heading?

ROBERT. I don't know.

WILMA. Des Moines?

ROBERT. I don't imagine.

WILMA. St. Louis?

ROBERT. Who knows?

WILMA. Chicago?

ROBERT. I might not leave at all for a while.

WILMA. Well, your brother stayed and he was wonderful, but we all expect you to be moving along like all the young boys now.

ROBERT. I don't know.

Downstairs in the Windrod house. NELLY has a hold on MARY's arm. MARY is turning backward, NELLY forward, MARY avoiding the raised hand threatening her, much as on a turntable going backward.

MARY. I know, I know, I know, I know, don't hit me; don't hit me, baby.

NELLY. What do you mean telling people a tale like that. You know I bought that mill.

MARY. You bought it, baby; I know you bought it.

NELLY. Well, they said in town you told I'd killed Dad to get it.

MARY. I said he died mysteriously.

NELLY. Well, he died of old age; he was ninety-six, for God's sakes.

MARY. He died mysteriously!

NELLY. In his sleep like you will; died of old age like you will. What in hell do you mean telling something like that?

MARY. I didn't mean to, baby. I don't mean to—

NELLY. —You're batty as a goddamned loon.

MARY. They don't like me is what it is. They know I watch them. They don't like me in town, I knew they didn't. I don't say those things. They tell things on me.

NELLY. You're crazy as hell is what it is; you're out of your god-damned mind is what it is.

MARY. Baby, don't talk like that. They tell fibs on me. They say—

NELLY. Showing them bruises and saying I beat you; when the hell

did I ever beat you? You know goddamned well how you get those bruises. You fall down! You bruise! You run into things! You're old. You bump things. Who the hell takes care of you and you telling lies on me like that, Mama—what do you mean?

MARY. I don't mean to.

NELLY. They don't listen to you—to say things like that.

MARY. They don't listen to me, Nelly.

NELLY. It doesn't do you any good; they come right in and tell me.

MARY. Don't hurt me.

NELLY. I think you better go on up to your room!

MARY. No, don't lock the door.

NELLY. If I leave the house, I'll lock the door or you'll wander out and get hurt. You'll fall down the stairs and tell I beat you.

MARY. I don't want to go up there; the evil town is all around me up there.

NELLY. Go upstairs, Mama.

MARY. It's painted on the windows—

NELLY. Well, pull the shades down if you don't want to see them.

[She leaves.]

MARY. My skin, whole body is just flaking away—this evil town! This evil town!

On a street in town: JOSH and all the young men in the cast except WALTER.

BOYS [taunting SKELLY, jeeringly]. Baaaaaaaaaaaa! Baaaaaaaaaaaa!
Baaaaaaaaaaaa! Baaaaaaaaaaaa!

SKELLY [in a deep, mangled, growling, almost drunken voice]. Get on, you son of bitch. Son of bitches. [Sounding about like "Geah-own-ya-sansobith! Sansobith!"]

BOYS. Baaaaaaaa! Baaaaaaaa!

SKELLY. Get the hell on, you, get on! [In a deep, almost terrified growl.] Go, go on, sonabith!

In the courtroom.

NELLY. And I heard something outside—

The town becomes alive everywhere. PECK, NELLY, MARY, JOSH, MARTHA and the JUDGE are in the court, PATSY and LENA in town;

EVELYN is walking out onto her porch calling Eva, who is approaching the porch. An area may be EVELYN's porch and part of the courtroom at the same time—the effect should be of the entire cast moving in a deliberate direction with lines coming in sequence from all over the stage. CORA enters the café area from upstairs, sleepily, calling softly, exactly as she will when the scene is repeated at the end of the first act.

JUDGE. A travesty of justice.

PECK. We, the jury—

CORA. Walter?

PECK.—find Nelly Windrod—

CORA. Walter?

PECK.—not guilty.

MARTHA. Not guilty.

CORA. Walter?

EVA. Robert?

NELLY. Oh, God; Mama?

EVELYN. Eva?

TRUCKER. Not guilty.

WILMA. Papa?

MAVIS. Peck?

JOSH. Not guilty. [He begins whistling softly, calling a dog.] Here, Blackie, here, boy.

WALTER. Cora!

CORA. Walter?

JUDGE. Not guilty.

PATSY. I know.

EVELYN. Eva? You come on, now.

CORA. Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God.

JOSH. Blackie? Here, Blackie?

EVELYN. You better get on in here now.

EVA. I'm coming.

JOSH. Come on, boy.

LENA. The poor thing.

PATSY. Really, I get so damn tired of all that nonsense.

LENA. I know, but they insist I wear it.

The movement subsides.

EVELYN [continuing]. You better put a sweater on if you're going to sit out there.

EVA [approaching the house]. I'm coming in directly.

EVELYN. Not directly, you come on in now.

EVA. All right.

EVELYN. Where were you all day?

EVA. I was wandering around the woods.

EVELYN. Now, you know I don't want you running around alone. What if you fell and hurt yourself and who'd ever know it?

EVA. I wasn't alone; Robert and I went walking.

EVELYN. Well, don't you go off alone.

EVA. I won't.

EVELYN. Not all afternoon. Wandering around; God knows what could happen to you.

EVA. I know, I don't.

EVELYN. You look so fatigued.

EVA. I'm not at all.

EVELYN. I don't want you spending so much time with that boy.

EVA. What boy?

EVELYN. That Driver Junior. Wandering around with that boy. Spending all afternoon and evening with him.

EVA. Well, who else would I spend it with?

EVELYN. Well, why do you have to go off every day of the week? Doing God knows what? You could visit the Stutses, you shouldn't be running around. It isn't good for you; you have to be careful. You're not like other kids; you know how easily you get fatigued; you run yourself out every day; perspiring like you do; wandering off with that boy. If something happened, who'd know? And don't think he's responsible; his brother might have been different; devil and his angels wouldn't know if something happened. I don't know why you can't stay at home like everyone else. Traipsing around the woods half-naked, what do you do out there in the woods alone, the two of you, anyhow?

EVA. Nothing.

EVELYN. I said you answer me.

EVA [rapidly]. Nothing!

EVELYN. I said you answer me the truth, young miss.

EVA. We don't do anything. Whatever you think.

EVELYN. Don't you talk back to me, what do you do, little miss smarty pants? All day gone from the house, smarty? [Hits her.]

EVA. We talk.

EVELYN. You talk, you talk, I'll just bet you talk; now you get in that house this minute do you hear me!

EVA [running to the witness stand]. I don't know what you think.

EVELYN. You get on in to the supper table! You're going to be the death of me. I swear, I swear, I swear.

Everyone is assembled in court.

JUDGE. —to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

ROBERT. She didn't see anything.

JUDGE. Eva, as a witness to this terrible—

EVA. I don't know! I didn't see! I didn't see! I told you I didn't see anything! [A long run into her MOTHER's open arms.]

EVA. Mama.

EVELYN. Leave my daughter alone! Can't you see she's upset? My God, what are you trying to do to her?

EVELYN [to Eva]. Poor baby—
[To CORA.] You know what I think of you? Before God!

CORA. I talked to her; she told me.

ROBERT [his lines overlapping CORA's]. She didn't see.

EVA. I don't know!

NELLY. It's not true, none of it, it's like I said. You're trying to make a murderer of me; it was God's will be done.

JUDGE [his voice rising above theirs, simultaneously, trying to quiet them]. We have all long known Skelly Mannor; we have known of his past—that latent evil in him, that unnatural desire, and we have long been aware that at any time the bitterness in his soul might again overflow. [Gen-

CORA. She told me!

eral crowd murmur.] We let things lie. We took no action to prevent his crime—the pending, at any moment, crime—we all knew it—and the burden must be ours. We are responsible for the shock to these two innocents.

The others have been quieted. General murmur in response to the JUDGE. Several Amens.

JUDGE [continuing]. We are responsible for our actions; for allowing the heathen in our fold!

The JUDGE's oratory slides into the PREACHER. We are at church.

CONGREGATION. Amen!

PREACHER. God forgive us.

CONGREGATION. Amen.

PREACHER. In Your wisdom forgive us. And help these two souls, these two innocent souls forget that dark moment.

CONGREGATION. Amen, amen.

PREACHER. Blind them to that dark moment and set them free, Lord.

CONGREGATION. Amen.

PREACHER. Dear Lord.

CONGREGATION. Amen.

PREACHER. Our Saviour!

In the café.

WALTER [to CORA]. Where do you want the pie?

CORA [warmly, chiding]. On the rack that says "pies."

WALTER. And the coffee in the jar that says "coffee" and the typed-up menus in the menu covers? I'll catch on.

CORA. You're doing fine.

WALTER. Well, for only a week.

CORA. You'll catch on.

In the congregation MARTHA says, very faintly, "A show place," echoed by "I hear" from WILMA.

WALTER [overlapping]. And you have to consider that we spend

more time upstairs than down, or I'd know a lot more about the restaurant business and a lot less about you.

CORA. Now you just clam up before somebody comes in.

WALTER. Ashamed, are you?

CORA. No, I most certainly am not and you know it, but I don't intend to bother someone else's business with my own.

WALTER. Wonder what they think?

CORA. You do, do you?

WALTER. "No, I most certainly do not and you know it"—I like the way you people talk. You're looking good.

CORA. I'm feeling good.

WALTER. What would you think about putting an awning over the door so a fellow doesn't get soaking wet with rain as soon as he steps out the door.

CORA. Hm. What'd I care if he's going out?

WALTER. Oh, it might be that on the way out is when he decides to come back.

CORA. You think, do you?

WALTER. "You think, do you?" It's something to consider.

WILMA. A show place.

The Johnson house.

PATSY. It's a trash heap is what it is. I don't know what keeps us here; I swear I don't. Maybe it was all right when you were young. The only people who ever comes into town is people to drive around looking around, poking around to see what a ghost town looks like. Movie house been closed down eight years; you want to see a movie you have to drive twenty miles into Centerville. Every building on Main Street closed up, falling down except a store and a grubby filling station. Boys stand out, hanging around, it's a disgrace—

On her porch.

EVELYN. —Can't be healthy, rats took over the old grainery, all the buildings rotting and falling down, the mine shaft building used to just shine; you could see it miles away; now the way it sags—falling apart, boarded together; everything flapping and rusting, it's an absolute eyesore. Cats poking around through the rotting

ruins of all those old buildings, their bellies just busting, it can't be healthy—

PATSY. —Dad could get a job in Centerville as well as here; I don't know why we stay here, there's a lot of decent people there, they know how to have fun, but no. We have to stay here. The boys from Centerville *all* have cars, I'm so ashamed getting off that ugly smelly school bus with all those younger kids, squealing; I swear sometimes I think I'm just going to sit there and not budge all day. Just let them drive right into the parking lot and sit there in the hot sun all day broiling rather than get off that bus with the boys all standing around the front of the school watching. I just wish you knew—they're probably surprised I don't smell of cow manure.

PECK. Patsy.

PATSY. Well, I'm sorry but it's true. I wish you could see the way they dress! In the summertime the boys from Centerville drive by on the highway alongside the field and I'm up on the hay wagon like some common hired hand and they yell and honk and carry on so damn smart I just wish I could die.

MAVIS. Patsy June.

PATSY. Well, I'm sorry but I do. At night sometimes I just cry my eyes out. Night after night. I just cry myself to sleep; I hope you're satisfied—

EVELYN. —Trying to scratch a living together. Trying to keep strong—

PATSY [leaving house; to LENA]. —I'm sorry, but I do—

EVELYN. —Sometimes I don't even know why we try—

LENA [on her porch]. I said it's warm, for crying out loud; it's May; school's nearly out; I don't know why I have to wear that ugly old thing, you have the nicest clothes. I never have a danged thing.

PATSY. Well, all the boys were wearing cashmere sweaters with V necks and I said if they can have them I sure as hell can; the girls in my class just turned pea-green-purple. I said, well, they didn't have what I wanted in Centerville, this two-bit town, so I went along with Dad to Des Moines; you should have seen them.

LENA. Peggy was furious.

PATSY. Oh, she thinks she's so rich; she has absolutely no taste at all.

LENA. I know.

PATSY. Black and brown and blue and green; I said the other day, "Why, Peggy, you look exactly the color of Chuck Melton's two-toned Mercury." You should have seen her face.

LENA. I wish I could have.

PATSY [as they walk away from the porch]. Well, listen; Chuck thinks he's so damn smart himself. Yelling to me, you should hear the things they say. It'd make your ears burn. I told him and he should know, if he wants to come by and come up to the door and knock like some kind of respectable person, then I'd go out; but I'm not going to just fly out of the house like that. He thinks he's so damn smart, I don't care how long he sits out in front of the house in his damn car. Honking. He can honk all night for all I care.

MARTHA [coming to the porch]. Evelyn said a regular show place.

WILMA. I heard she closes up at ten every night now.

MARTHA. Oh, my . . .

WILMA [leaving porch]. Ours is not to judge.

MARTHA. Still I know what I know.

LENA [joins her mother]. I know he did it. Why would anyone want to poison a helpless dog?

MARTHA. He just looked up at me like he knew I'd help him and there wasn't anything I could do this time and I think he knew.

LENA. I don't understand somebody doing something like that.

MARTHA. There wasn't anything I could do. Just nothing at all.

LENA. Why?

MARTHA. I don't know, love.

LENA [repeating, with same inflection]. Why?

MARTHA. I don't know, love.

LENA. Why?

MARTHA. I don't know, love.

LENA. Just a helpless little dog, he was too old to hurt anybody. There's somebody poisoning dogs around here and that's the lowest, meanest thing in the world.

MARTHA. No one should cause an animal to suffer like that.

LENA. I know he did it, too. I know it was him.

MARTHA. Well, we can think what we think, but we can't do anything.

LENA. I've seen how they bark at him; you know that. A dog can tell an evil person; a dog can tell; they're all scared of him.

WILMA [coming to the porch]. Wickedest man; creeping through town, looking into things.

MARTHA. Peeping into girls' bedrooms; standing around looking like that.

WILMA. Who knows what's in someone's mind like that?

PATSY screams very loudly, running from her bedroom into the living room.

PECK [startled]. What in God's name?

PATSY. Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God. In there.

MAVIS. What's wrong, baby?

PATSY. I saw him. I saw him. Oh, God, he was looking in the window. His face—

PECK. Who was? Answer me.

MAVIS. Skelly?

PATSY. Skelly. Skelly. Skelly was. Oh, God, you should have seen his eyes! And I was only in my pants. You should have seen him.

JOSH. I don't know what he could have seen.

MAVIS. That's enough out of you now.

PECK. Where was he?

PATSY. At my bedroom window, where do you think?

MAVIS. You're imagining things; you're dreaming.

PATSY. I wasn't asleep, I tell you; I just was getting ready for bed.

PECK. It's okay now, I'll go out.

PATSY. No, he's gone now, my God, I screamed and he ran away.

PECK [with some humor]. Well, I'd think he would.

JOSH. Wake the dead; what's he gonna see?

MAVIS. Don't you start.

PATSY [contrite]. I'm sorry.

MAVIS. For what?

JOSH. Sorry he didn't come on in probably.

PATSY. For scaring you so.

MAVIS. It's all right. My word, something like that, I'd think you would.

PATSY. Only I was just so scared.

MAVIS. Of course you would. [JOSH is stifling a laugh.] That's enough, Dad said.

PATSY. It was horrible.

MAVIS. It's all right now.

PATSY. I don't think I can go back in my room.

JOSH. Oh, good Lord.

PECK. Young man.

MAVIS. It's all right now.

PATSY. Can't I sleep with you tonight?

MAVIS. It's all right now.

PATSY. Just tonight.

MAVIS. No, now, he's gone.

JOSH. What are you, some kind of baby?

PATSY. I was just so scared.

MAVIS. Go on back to bed, honey.

PATSY. I'm sorry.

MAVIS. It's okay.

PATSY. It was horrible. Can't I sleep between you? I'm shaking like a leaf.

MAVIS. It was nothing.

PATSY. Just tonight?

MAVIS. You're too big for that kind of thing.

PATSY. Something ought to be done about him.

MAVIS. It was your imagination, it was the wind; it was the shadows.

PATSY. It was Skelly Mannor! I guess I know him when I see him.

MAVIS. Go on back to bed. He's gone.

PATSY. I know I saw him.

MAVIS. Go on, it's okay now; he's gone; whoever it was.

PATSY. Well, it was Skelly Mannor, I guess I know who it was, I saw him.

MAVIS. Something ought to be done about him.

JOSH. He hasn't hurt anyone—not yet.

MAVIS. I suppose you call scaring an innocent girl out of her wits

doing nothing. And the whole family too. Everyone knows what he does.

JOSH. Well, what could he do but look? He must be over a hundred if he's a day.

MAVIS. Just looking is doing; who knows what he might do?

JOSH. He's eighty years old.

PATSY. He is not. How can you tell how old he is, through all that filth.

PECK. Well, I know when I was a young man like Josh or younger we used to give old Skelly a "baaa" sometimes—

MAVIS. Peck, now—

PECK. Well, and he looked the same then as he does now, and all the men then said he'd been looking like that for as long as they could remember so he's getting on.

JOSH. He's just a curiosity.

PATSY. Oh, that's very funny. A curiosity. You're just as bright as the sun; you ought to hide your head under a barrel.

JOSH. He's not hurt anybody. Except Warren Peabody.

PATSY. Well, Warren Peabody deserved whatever he got, I'm sure.

MAVIS. What did he do to Warren, is that Laura Peabody's boy?

PATSY. Oh, Lord no; you know he drives an old Chivy, from over at Centerville; part of that river trash bunch. [Exits, coming to LENA.]

JOSH. Well, he hit Warren in the back of the head with a rock, threw it, I'll bet, thirty feet, and caught Warren running. Knocked him out cold.

In town.

LENA [talking to PATSY]. I remember when Driver was alive.

PATSY. Before his accident.

LENA. This was a wonderful place.

PECK [continuing]. He's got a good aim, I can vouch for that.

MAVIS. I've told you, Josh, I don't want you boys teasing him. You just ignore him, I don't care how old you are. I don't know why you do that. You know he could turn on you any second.

JOSH. Oh, I don't bother him.

MAVIS. Well, who knows what's in somebody's mind like that.

On WILMA's porch.

WILMA. Like that time he scared young Patsy so bad.

MARTHA. Bad for the whole town with someone like that.

LENA [to PATSY]. Like that parade every Saturday afternoon with Driver spinning through town, laughing; I remember his laugh.

PECK. I remember he let Curt Watson have it across the side of the face once. Curt was the fastest runner in town too; let him have it once when Curt gave him a "baaa."

JOSH. God knows he's crazy enough to try to do something like that with a sheep.

MAVIS. Josh, now.

JOSH. Well, I figure maybe he couldn't get a girl.

MAVIS. That's enough.

JOSH. Well, now, the whole town knows what he did; it's not like it was some secret—it's the funniest thing anyone's ever seen around here.

MAVIS. It's not our place to talk.

PECK. I don't imagine he did it much more than once and that time he got caught.

JOSH. That's about the dumbest thing I ever heard. He must have been really hard up is all I can say.

On WILMA's porch.

WILMA. To do some bestial thing like that.

MARTHA. When I think of the evil in this world.

LENA [to PATSY]. I could just cry.

JOSH. Who saw him?

PECK. Hell, I don't know. It must have been before I was born..

JOSH. Hell, he must be eighty years old.

PECK. Well, he's getting on.

PATSY [to LENA]. And Driver Junior. I think he hated his brother. He's just nothing compared. His brother was always so happy at least.

LENA. Driver's been dead now three years tomorrow.

PATSY. May thirty-first.

LENA. Every time I see that car, it just kills me.

JOSH. Some dumb old sheepherder. I hear they're all like that.

PECK. Well, they don't get into town much. Shit, they sure must be hard up is all I can say.

PATSY [to LENA]. His name is Walter, I found out.

JOSH. Shit, I wish I could of seen him. That old son of a bitch. We ought to have him tarred and feathered on Halloween if anyone could find him on Halloween. That old bastard, I don't know how he gets away with the things he does. I know Driver and me was gonna run him out of town once; I think we got drunk instead.

PECK. When was that?

JOSH. Just before his accident sometime. Shit, we used to run that old boy ragged.

PECK. You watch yourself.

MARTHA [to WILMA]. When I think of the evil in this world, I swear.

JOSH. Aw, he hasn't hurt anybody. [He leaves PECK and MAVIS.]

LENA [to PATSY]. I could just cry.

MAVIS. A decent person is afraid to move outside at night; now what kind of life is that?

PECK. Well, we'll tell Clevis and see what he says. He can't do nothing; we didn't catch him at it.

MAVIS. It'll be too late one day and then who's to blame.

The light fades on PECK and MAVIS.

Downstairs at the Windrod house.

MARY. I saw it.

NELLY. Sure you did, Mama.

MARY. In my dream. Oh, God; it was horrible, Nelly.

NELLY. Go back to sleep, Mama.

MARY. Someone's going to be butchered in this town. Blood is going to be shed.

NELLY. Be still.

MARY. Blood is going to be shed; someone is going to be butchered.

NELLY. Go on out into your garden, Mama; go back upstairs.

CONGREGATION [softly singing].

"I walk through the garden alone;
While the dew is still on the roses . . . [Fading.]

And the voice I hear, falling on my ear—
The prince of peace discloses . . ."

A street.

SKELLY. Hey.

EVA. What? What? What do you want?

SKELLY. You tell him—

EVA. What? I don't know who you're talking about—what do you want?

SKELLY. Your friend.

EVA. Who?

SKELLY. Him. Robert.

EVA. Tell him what?

SKELLY. Tell him he's all right.

EVA. What do you mean he's all right?

SKELLY. He's a good boy.

EVA. Well, I imagine he knows that.

SKELLY. People talk but they don't know—it's them that's the bastards. He's all right.

EVA. You're terrible the way you talk. Nobody makes fun of him. It's you they laugh at.

SKELLY. You tell him . . .

EVA. I don't know what you're talking about. I wouldn't tell anybody anything you told me to tell them.

In the store.

CORA. He drifted in town and he helped around the café for a while and he drifted on; nothing was holding him here.

MARTHA. I heard you started closing the place up at ten in the evening when that boy started working for you.

CORA. When Walter came, yes, I did. I closed earlier. I don't know why I used to be open all that late for anyway.

MARTHA. I heard you still close it up at ten, though.

CORA. Well, force of habit, I suppose.

MARTHA. How long is it he's been gone?

CORA. I don't know, Mrs. Truit; I suppose a month now.

MARTHA. I heard you two made that café a regular show place.

CORA. You'll have to come up sometime and have a cup of coffee and a piece of pie.

MARTHA. Yes, when you was still with your husband, before he left, I mean, I know you used to make the best pie in the state.

CORA. It's still pretty good.

MARTHA [*leaving the store*]. Yes, I will, I'll come up and see you one day. [To WILMA.] "Helped around the store," did you ever hear anything like it? I heard she still closes the café at ten sharp. They say he left without taking so much as a stitch she'd bought him. Didn't leave a note even—

In town.

JOSH. I hear Hilltop would be an easy place to break into, if you had in mind to steal something.

MARTHA [to WILMA]. Leaves the door for him still, every night.

WILMA. I hear.

MARTHA. Closes at ten.

LENA [to JOSH]. That's what I heard.

WILMA. What Reverend Parker said is so true.

MARTHA. Oh, I know it is.

WILMA. It's difficult for us to accept.

MARTHA. "We must accept the blame upon ourselves. Each and every one of us."

WILMA. "It's not Nelly Windrod who is being tried here today."

MARTHA. "Nelly Windrod is not the person who is being tried here today."

WILMA. —No indeed—

PREACHER [to CONGREGATION]. —It is the soul and responsibility of our very community. The laxity with which we met the obligations of our Christian lives. The blindness from which we allowed evil in our lives.

CONGREGATION. Amen.

PREACHER. Evil in our lives.

CONGREGATION. Amen.

PREACHER. We watched it fester and grow; we allowed this dreadful thing to happen through shirking our Christian duty. Nelly Windrod—

WILMA. —is not on trial here today.

PREACHER. —No indeed. That man. May the Lord have mercy on his soul. [Waits.]

CONGREGATION. Amen.

PREACHER. May the Lord have mercy on his soul and mercy on our blindness to His way. It is our responsibility and we must share in that terrible knowledge.

In town.

LENA. It's not that bad.

PATSY. It's terrible, this crummy old ghost town; tumbleweed blowing down the deserted streets.

LENA. There's no tumbleweed blowing down the—

PATSY. Well, there ought to be, it's enough to give a person the creeps. Everyone from Centerville and all over driving by to see where the murder was committed; it's creepy. Looking at this awful ugly old ghost town, and all the boys know I live here, I swear, I've never been so humiliated in my life.

LENA. I know, it's terrible.

PATSY. Driver Junior never talks to anyone any more—I haven't even seen him with Eva; of course her—that dumb cripple hasn't said a word since. Everyone staring at her—the whole thing is just the ugliest thing I ever heard about. I knew what was going to happen, I said. I swear Driver Junior is such a creep—never spoke to anyone in his life anyway. Doesn't hang around with us or anyone else his own age; hanging around with her, that girl, I feel sorry for her and all, but I look at her and I just feel my shoulder blades start to poach out all over, people like that—deformed people ought to be put out of sight. Like her and Skelly and everybody; I mean people with deformed minds as well, too; don't think I'm forgetting that. It's absolutely creepy the way people drive through here; I've never been so humiliated in my life.

A street.

SKELLY. You! Hey, Robert. Bobby! Hey!

ROBERT. Hay is for sheep.

SKELLY. Yeah, uh, you, uh—Driver is dead.

ROBERT. Well, I guess I know that.

SKELLY. You going around like—

ROBERT. What? What do you want?

SKELLY. He was a son of a bitch.

ROBERT. Don't talk like that to me.

SKELLY. You don't talk bad.

ROBERT. I don't, no, because I don't see any need to talk—

SKELLY. Driver was a sonabitch. Walking like some kind of stud horse. He wasn't human.

ROBERT. Who are you to tell if someone is human or—

SKELLY. You know what he did? I say. You didn't go to the races to see him kill himself.

ROBERT. My brother was a very good race car driver and I didn't go because I don't like them; if everyone went and I didn't, it's because they like them and I don't.

SKELLY. You don't know. I'll tell you what your sonabitch was like.

ROBERT. You don't know anything.

SKELLY. You hear me talking to people? I *see*. He was a snotnose kid, twelve when you was born. I saw him. And him driving through town like a big shot. With his racing car all green and yellow and rared back there. Lined up after him in cars, trailing after him and honking like a string of geese coming into town.

SKELLY [continuing]. And him telling everybody about it up at the café. I heard the stories and the shouting and the glory.

WILMA [to MARTHA, on the latter's porch]. Land, it was wonderful just to hear them cheering.

ROBERT. I don't know what you're talking about.

MARTHA. Another silver cup, another blue ribbon.

WILMA. First place.

SKELLY. I saw him with Betty Atkins—in her bedroom and her crying and crying and how he hit her—you didn't know that! And she cried 'cause he got so mad. He liked to killed her.

ROBERT. I thought people made up stories about you peeping into windows—you're worse than they say.

SKELLY. I SAW HIM! You're better for a man than he is.

ROBERT. You're disgusting; you're as bad as everybody says you are. Dad says you are and Driver said so too.

SKELLY. Yeah, because I told him I saw him. Your brother, you know what he did? You know what he did? He had to help himself. Had to help himself out. Out in his car parked on the road and in his room. He had to do it for himself.

ROBERT. Shut up!

SKELLY. That's what I know.

ROBERT. You're disgusting. You should be killed or jailed; my brother was a good person; he was a wonderful person.

SKELLY. He beat Betty Atkins and did it by hand. Jacking all on her. I've seen him. I've seen him.

ROBERT. Baaaaaaa.

SKELLY. That's what I know.

ROBERT. You're worse than they say. Everybody knows you spy on them. Who do you think you are?

SKELLY. Who do you think your sonabitch brother was? Is what I want to—

ROBERT. Baaaaaaa. Baaaaaaa.

SKELLY. Now you know! Go on.

ROBERT. BAAAAAAAAA! Baaaaaaaaaa.

SKELLY. Get on—get on—Driver Junior, you like that? I know, I know. You like that? Get on. Hey—

ROBERT exits.

WILMA. Such a beautiful man; lived so dangerous; like the world wasn't turning fast enough to suit him.

MARTHA. Gave of himself until there was nothing else and got himself killed in an accident.

WILMA. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

MARTHA. Poor lad. I swear.

Silence. Same street as top of page 27, precisely as before.

SKELLY. Boy! Robert!! Boy! Hey!

EVA. What? What? What do you want?

SKELLY. You tell him—

EVA. What? I don't know who you're talking about—what do you want?

SKELLY. Your friend.

EVA. Who?

SKELLY. Him. Robert.

EVA. Tell him what?

SKELLY. Tell him he's all right.

EVA. What do you mean he's all right?

SKELLY. He's a good boy.

EVA. Well, I imagine he knows that.

SKELLY. People talk but they don't know—it's them that's the bastards. He's all right.

EVA. You're terrible the way you talk. Nobody makes fun of him. It's you they laugh at.

SKELLY. You tell him.

EVA. I don't know what you're talking about. I wouldn't tell anyone anything you told me to tell them.

SKELLY. You tell him . . .

In court.

PECK. We, the jury, find Nelly Windrod. Not guilty.

NELLY [in court]. Oh, Cod, oh, Cod. Mama?

JUDGE. It is not Nelly Windrod who is on trial here today.

In town.

PATSY. Tumbleweed blowing through town; it's so creepy I don't know how anyone can stand it.

LENA [to PATSY]. There's no tumbleweed blowing through . . .

On the Windrod porch.

MARY [to EVA]. You talk to him and that's nice. I talk to things too. I talk. I have several tropical fish and a number of small birds that I feed each and every day and take excellent care of them. Talking with them until they die. I like little things, with little hearts beating and little lives around me. Their little hearts just moving away. With short life spans and high temperatures. And I pat out little graves like loaves in the back yard and put little whitewashed gravel, little rocks around each one, and that's my garden. And I decorate the little loaves with flowers when I remember to. Now there's Trinket. That was my rat terrier, died eleven years ago last November, and Bonnie, my cocker spaniel, died four years ago last October, all in the fall; and Cilda and

Wanda, the two goldfish, floating on their sides one morning, little loaves, those two. And Chee-chee, my canary, died two years ago last September. And Goldie, my other canary passed on the year after that and Tina, the little blue kitten—beautiful kitten, that one's little too. She prefers violets and Goldie takes daisies and Chee-chee takes dandelions and Bonnie takes roses, and Trinket has daffodils generally—spring daffodils and Wanda tulips; and the flowers dry up and die and I feel I should bury them too. All my children. Gonc, gone, gone.

CONGREGATION [singing softly].

"I walk in the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear
Falling on my ear
The son of Cod discloses.
And he walks with me——"

MARY and EVA join the CONGREGATION, MARY by her daughter, EVA by her mother.

CORA [enters the café from upstairs, sleepily, calling softly as if awakened from sleep]. Walter?

CONGREGATION. "And he talks with me."

CORA. Walter?

CONGREGATION. "And he tells me I am his own."

CORA. Walter?

CONGREGATION. "And the joy we share."

CORA. Walter!

CONGREGATION. "As we tarry there!"

CORA. Walter!

CONGREGATION. "None other. Has ever——"

CORA. Walter.

CONGREGATION. "Known."

PREACHER. Let us pray.

They bow their heads in silence.

CORA [falling to her knees as though felled]. Oh, Cod. Oh, Cod. Oh, God. Oh, Cod. Oh, Cod. Oh, God. Oh, Cod.

Curtain.

On the Johnson porch.

PATSY [to LENA]. It wasn't really sudden. I knew he wanted to, he'd let on, you know, in little ways. He said would I mind not being in school; he'll graduate, of course, 'cause this is his last year—and I said would I *mind*?

LENA. That's just incredible; when's it going to be?

PATSY. We aren't messing around; he said two weeks from this Saturday. He didn't want to have a church wedding at first—you know how he is—and I said, Chuck Melton, if you think I'm going to just run off to a preacher and practically elope you got another think coming. So it'll be the First Presbyterian of Centerville, but I want it to be just simple. I said I wanted a street-length dress—I know, but that's what I want and I'll have a veil, a little pillbox hat, I love those, and a veil and probably roses, if it's not too early for roses—

In the Windrod house.

MARY [over]. —Bonnie? Here girl. Bonnie? Here kitty, kitty—

LENA. —I'm just so surprised.

PATSY. Well, it wasn't really sudden; I knew he wanted to, he'd let on. I love the First Presbyterian. I only hope the trial and all is quieted down. That could just ruin it all.

LENA. Oh, it will be.

PREACHER [over]. Now you know I'm aware we all want to get this settled and go home and forget about it.

PATSY. It's a beautiful church.

LENA. I really love it; it's just beautiful.

PATSY. And my aunt's gonna give the bride's breakfast.

LENA. Aren't you excited?

PATSY. I imagine we'll live in Centerville. You know, till we have enough money to get a place or maybe move somewhere. Probably right in town; there's a wonderful place over the barbershop, the Reganson one on the corner with windows on both sides that's been empty for weeks. I only hope someone doesn't beat us to it. I want to tell Chuck to put some money down on it. I don't want to live with his folks. I just can't stand them and I don't think they think too much of me either. They're so square

and old-fashioned. They really are. They don't even smoke or believe in make-up or anything.

LENA. Chuck is wonderful, he really is. I'm just so surprised.

PATSY [beginning to cry gently]. He was so cute; he said would I mind not being in school next year, junior year, and I said of course I'll miss my friends, but would I *mind*?

LENA. It's so beautiful. It's a beautiful church for a wedding.

PATSY. Isn't it?

LENA. Aren't you excited? What's wrong?

PATSY. Well, of course I am, silly.

LENA. I don't think Josh and me want to get married, though, until after I'm out of school.

PATSY. Oh, my God, you don't want to marry Josh. My Lord, I can't imagine it. You're not serious about him. Lord, he's so childish.

LENA. He isn't. He's six years older than you are. He's worked for two years.

PATSY. Well, I know, but you don't want to marry him. Age doesn't have anything to do with it. He's all right and he's sweet and all, but I mean to go to the show with and hold hands. I don't know how you can bear to ride into town in that garage tow truck, though.

LENA. I drive it sometimes; it's not bad.

PATSY. Well, I know, but Josh! Lord, Lena, I've got so many things to do yet. You know the thing I think I like most about Chuck is that he's so clean and neat and all. The way he takes care of his Mercury. It's always like spanking new.

In court.

ROBERT. And he took us by surprise.

In the café.

CORA [to WALTER]. You seem uneasy.

WALTER. I'm not really.

CORA. I depend on you too much probably.

WALTER. Huh? No, nothing's wrong.

CORA. I've always had a dream, an idea, of maybe leaving here.

WALTER. You have?

CORA. Would you like that?

WALTER. And go where? Hawaii?

CORA. Well, no, not quite Hawaii. I don't know. It's sometimes somewhere and sometimes somewhere else. Somewhere. St. Louis maybe; Des Moines, Chicago. Anywhere.

WALTER. What would you do there?

CORA. The same, of course. Only a nice place maybe. I know the business, if I could sell this place.

WALTER. You wouldn't want to do that, would you?

CORA. Wouldn't you like that? St. Louis maybe, or anywhere. I thought you'd like that. Have a bigger place. Maybe hire someone to run it for us so it doesn't take up all our time.

WALTER. That's an idea. I can't say I like St. Louis much.

CORA. Have you been there? Well, Chicago then.

WALTER. Chicago's nice.

CORA. I have a uncle in Chicago; he might help us get started. What's wrong, anything? You seem uneasy.

WALTER. I'm not. Why don't we close early.

CORA. I'd be agreeable to that.

MARTHA [coming to Eva's porch]. Is she any better?

EVELYN. Oh, I don't know. Who can tell?

SKELLY [*entering his shack; alone*]. Hound? Hey, hound. What are you shaking about, huh? Get your tail up in the air and out from between your legs like a hunting dog. No, you wouldn't be any good for that, would you? What kind of dog are you? Huh? I got a roast bone from Cora's for you. Here. There you go. Go to it. Those guns scare you, do they? Those hunters? Eh? Oh, they strut around and shoot around after their quail and their duck and their pheasants. They scare you, huh? If you wasn't wild, you could sit out on the steps, huh? No, they'd shoot off one of those duck guns or a firecracker and off you'd go back in under the bed, huh? Under the steps. And they're wasting their shot anyhow. Couldn't hit the broad side of a barn ten feet off. You should have seen it with the mines running. With the mines working and the dynamite and the what-you-call-it booming around everywhere underground fifty times a day or more. Boom! [Laughs.] Boom! [Laughs.] Every hound . . . [Coughs.] . . . every hound in town

kept out of sight from seven in the morning till seven at night. Under every bed in town. That'd make you shake. Eat it. That's roast bone. You. [Laughs.]

You good for nothing. Oh, hell, yes. They was fancy people; butter wouldn't melt. Old Man Reiley bought the Eldritch place up on the hill, wouldn't no other place do for him, and carried on with their miners drinking parties and societies if you please. And Glenna Ann sashaying around serving tidbits on a platter; oh, well-to-do. Blast all day in the mines all day and blast all night at home. Old Man Reiley called me every name in the book. Fit to be tied. She was a pretty one, too; only eighteen, the both of us and her wearing dresses to the ground and bows and her old man called me every name in the book. Chased me off the place with a crowbar. [Laughs.] And we done it in the old man's woodshed. Oh, sure. I sneaks back the very same night and we done it out in the woodshed there. Everything smelling of hickory and cedar for their fancy fireplaces. Oh, yeah. And, oh, how she did squirm! Oh, Lord. Saying to me, "Oh, I love you. Oh, I love you, oh, really I do, Skelly." Oh, shit. [Coughs.] Till I thought she was gonna croak. Oh, Lord. Never let on she even knew me. Sashay around town with her big hats. Glenna Ann. Pretty girl. Oh, yeah. No girl in town so pretty. Then or now. None in between. How she did claw and bite. No bigger than a mite. Hound. Where'd you go? Don't you bury that. You eat that now. That's good. You no good. Old Man Reiley moved off; she moved off, whole family, lock, stock, and petticoat. Mines give out, off they git. How she did squirm. "Oh, I love you so much." Oh, sure. Pretty girl too. Right in the woodhouse the very night her old man chased me off with a crowbar. And we sat up against the wall there, playing in the shavings on the floor. Till morning, near. Sure. All blue. The bluest blue in the morning. Blue light on her gown there. Sticking her feet into the shavings—digging. Holding hands, panting. Where's that tea kettle, huh? Where'd it go? Make some sassafras. Yeah, wouldn't eat it if I gave it to you, would you? Don't know what's good, do you? Beautiful tits; no tits like that then or since. I guess you know Peck Johnson fairly beat the shit out of that girl of his last night. Whipped her good. Never seen anything like it. Thought she was dead. Patsy. Little whore she is, too. Thought he near to killed her. The old lady standing there with her teeth clenched watching, white as a ghost

. . . mad as the devil. Good! I say good! What she done, I say good! She deserved it; little whore. Here, you whore. Go on with you! get on out with you. Filthy brother; whole family right along brother and sister both. Beat her till she nearly bled. Thought he was gonna kill her. People don't care! What kind of thing goes on. What kind of devilment. Where'd you go to? Hound? What-are-you-not eating? If you was tame, you could come out and sit on the street. Catch a rabbit, huh? You scared of rabbits? Are you? That's a good girl. You're okay. Bluest blue you ever saw in the daytime. Cold too and her in a nightgown; run right off of the house when I called up and off we went. [Laughs.] Oh, boy! Arms is no good. Can't lift 'em even over my head. Look a-there. Oh, boy. Red thing over her nightgown there. Barefoot. Grass sticking to her feet from the fresh-cut lawns with their lackeys there, mowing and clipping and futsing. Barefoot. Right across the dew and all.

That crippled girl, Jackson, she's got her leg shorter, one than the other. Cries. You never saw anything like it. Dances around her room in the window curtains, all lace, wrapped around her whooping, dancing around like a banshee. Oh, he's all right. Tell him I said he's all right. Well, I guess he knows that. No, he don't know it, now, there! Better'n his no good brother everybody yelling about doing it by hand. Hitting girls around. People don't care! They don't see. What. What they want to think they think; what they don't they don't. They don't care anyway; what kind of devilment. What goes on. Her old man, Old Man Reiley; never did know. No, no. Never did know. I weren't the only one either, you can bet. Get some water boiling; make some sassafras; good for the stomach. Cedar. All in the air. Bluest blue in the air. Hickory and cedar cedar cedar cedar cedar in the air. Sang. [Laughs.] All manner of songs there. Soft so's it wouldn't carry to the lackeys' house there. Carrying on, scratching, biting, thought she was gonna croak. "Oh, really, oh, I love you so!" [Laughs.] Pretty girl. Beautiful tits. Beautiful tits. Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

On Eva's porch.

MARTHA. Is she any better?

EVELYN. Oh, I don't know. Who can tell?

MAVIS. Has she said anything?

EVELYN. The doctor said it was just shock.

MARTHA. Well, I'd think so.

WILMA. I've never heard anything like it.

MARTHA. Like when he scared young Patsy so bad.

WILMA. Bad for the whole town.

MAVIS. It's awful.

PATSY. I feel so sorry for her.

WILMA. How's Driver Junior?

EVELYN. He hasn't been over. I don't know what to think about that. I'd told her not to go off; well, I won't say anything.

MARTHA. Such a shock. For us all.

MAVIS. A terrible thing.

EVELYN. She's always been so easily upset.

LENA. Well, she has cause.

PATSY. I just wish he was still alive! That's what I wish.

WILMA. When I think of the evil in this world.

EVELYN. The doctor said she just needs rest.

MAVIS. If he'd of lived he'd not have seen the light of day tomorrow.

WILMA. That poor girl.

MARTHA. And Nelly, that poor woman, the life that woman leads.

WILMA [*leaving*]. I said to Eva's mother—cried the whole time—

MARTHA. I know, I saw—

WILMA. Only God in His Heaven.

In court.

MARY. It appeared to me that both the men were hitting at her.

Tremendous crowd reaction.

JUDGE. Order!

MARY. It appeared to me.

JUDGE. Now you have testified, as a witness, Mrs. Windrod.

MARY. I was at my window, watching the moon.

ROBERT [*to MARY, but not in court*]. Was there a moon?

MARY. A crescent moon that night, I know for sure.

JUDGE. You have testified that you saw—

MARY. Blood, everywhere; all over. It was terrible. On the porch, rivers and I was mopping and it spread with the water, all around, all over.

JUDGE. —Driver Junior and young Eva clearly.

MARY. I didn't say "clearly," I couldn't see clearly; I don't see well.

JUDGE. You testified you saw—

MARY. In my dream.

JUDGE. You were asleep?

MARY. Weeks ago and I told Nelly that blood was going to be shed, and I was wiping and it spread with the water, all around on the porch— [She leaves the stand.]

NELLY [*taking the stand*]. And Mama said someone was in the back yard and I took up the gun that I keep by the door, the shotgun; and checked to see if it was loaded and it was and I opened the door.

MARY [*over*]. —Bonnie? Here, kitty, kitty, here, girl.

In the café.

CORA [to WALTER]. Did you go into town?

WALTER. Yeah.

CORA. Into Centerville?

WALTER. No, no, only into Eldritch.

CORA. Did you? Well, what do you think?

WALTER. Well, what can I tell you, it's a ghost town.

CORA. I told you.

WALTER. What was that big building?

CORA. The movie house?

WALTER. On the corner.

CORA. Oh, there was a drugstore, and an exchange. And a lawyer's office and a couple of doctors up above had their office in that building. A dentist, I think. That was the first building to shut down.

WALTER. Some people said hello like they knew me.

CORA. Well, they do know you from here.

WALTER. Wonder what they think?

CORA. You do, do you?

WALTER. Sometimes.

CORA. Peck Johnson said the new boy "helping" me appeared to be a genuine good worker.

WALTER. What did you say to that?

CORA. Well, I said, oh, yes, yes, he's a genuine good worker.

WALTER [*laughing*]. I like some of them all right. The truck drivers are all right, anyway.

CORA. Oh, they're from all over; they support the place. Have for years.

WALTER. Some of the people from Eldritch aren't so bad.

CORA. I think a couple of the girls have a crush on you. Well, I don't blame them.

WALTER. They're young.

CORA. Well, they're not all that damn young.

WALTER. It's gonna be a nice night.

CORA. It's gonna be a nice summer.

JOSH and the TRUCKER walk casually to SKELLY.

EVA [*in the woods*]. No, in the wintertime and in the autumn especially. It's so nice; it smells so clean.

ROBERT [*in court*]. He came from nowhere!

EVELYN [*on her porch*]. I said she shouldn't be out gone from the house like that!

JOSH [to SKELLY]. What are you standing on the corner about? Why aren't you back to your grubby house? Where do you sleep now your stinking shack burned down? Or do you sleep? Do you sleep? Sleep with sheep, huh?

SKELLY. Get on.

TRUCKER. What'd you say?

SKELLY. Mind your own business.

JOSH. Which old damp rotting cellar do you haul up in now your dry old shack's gone? Huh? I bet you eat worms, doncha.

SKELLY. Go on, you.

JOSH. What d'you eat? Won't tell anybody where you live, will you? 'Cause you know what'd happen if you closed your eyes there, don't you?

SKELLY. Yeah, you sonabitch, you mind your own—I don't say whether I got ary a bed or no now.

JOSH. What'd you call me?

SKELLY. Go on with you.

JOSH. I said what'd you call me?

TRUCKER. Ought to kill him, Josh.

JOSH. What'd you say? Shit, he ain't worth it.

SKELLY. Get on.

JOSH. Just don't let anybody follow you home. [SKELLY leaves.] You get on now. You're the one who had better get on, not me. You'll wake up to a hot bed one of these days again. [Laughs.] Old bastard. BAAAAAA! [Laughs.]

TRUCKER. Son of a bitch shepherd!

In court.

ROBERT. He was just there all of a sudden from nowhere and he took us by surprise and he pushed me—he hit me from behind; I don't know if I passed out or not. [Crowd murmur.] He's immensely strong. [Crowd murmur.]

MARY [overlapping crowd murmur, in her house]. Nelly, Nelly, there's someone out back, honey, having a terrible fight. They came through the woods and started yelling all kinds of things.

NELLY [to MARY]. Where was you? I thought you was in bed.

ROBERT. And I heard a ringing in my ears and I saw what he was trying to do and everything went white. [Crowd reaction.] And he pushed me! [Crowd reaction.]

MARY. You better go out and see, honey.

PATSY [to LENA; in town]. I mean he's out there polishing the chrome and dash and all.

LENA. I know, it's amazing.

Some of the crowd reaction has been to Eva, who has been moaning throughout ROBERT's testimony. Now she screams—a huge ear-splitting scream, and I mean it.

EVELYN. Oh, God, baby, my baby—

EVA.—No, no, no, no, no!—

EVELYN. See her crippled body. See her broken back; why, why has God cursed me with this burden. I don't complain. I ask why?

We love Him. We bless Him. Praise Him. And this monster! I mean Skelly! My daughter is weak; you're trying to kill her! Look at her! Is that what you want? I only ask why?

PREACHER [overlapping]. The Lord works in—

EVELYN [overlapping]. WHY? I said, why? I have a right to know; I'll repent if I've done anything; if I've sinned—

CORA [overlapping]. —Eva said to me—Eva, you know what you said. Skelly worked for me sometimes; none of you knew him. He was honest.

EVELYN [overlapping]. My daughter has never spoken to you; my daughter has never spoken to a person like you; my daughter has been scarred, permanently scarred by this. She's crippled already. She's weak. She can't stand up.

CORA. If you'd listen to me.

EVELYN. No, no. I won't listen to you; I won't trust the word of a woman like you.

CORA. And what are you?

Crowd reaction, which continues until singing begins.

EVELYN [screaming wildly]. My daughter is a virgin! She's pure! She's a Christian, from a Christian home; a daughter of God and you'd put your word against the word of a virgin. A beer-swilling harlot. Everyone knows. A drunken Whore of Babylon! Harlot! Daughter of Babylon! Co back to your beer parlor; your house of sin. You couldn't keep your husband and you couldn't keep your whore boy friend. In the name of God before this court I call you that. Liar. You're the liar. Before God I call you that. On His word. His holy word. Yes! Put her on the stand. Let her

CORA. I talked to her because I knew Skelly would never, never harm anyone. If you'd listen to me.

JUDGE [begins pounding steadily with the gavel]. Order. Order. Order. Order.

The CONGREGATION begins singing "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," to the rhythm of the gavel. The CONGREGATION drowns EVELYN out with the loud, joyous hymn, the pulpit beaten now, in time to the song. The song is sung to its finish. Everyone moves into small groups. Worried, quiet.

talk. We have nothing to hide. Ask her if she didn't keep a whore boy friend up to her place. Ask her what kind of woman she is. . . .

A long pause. Silence.

PATSY [very upset; quietly to WALTER]. Pretty sure.

WALTER [beside her, after a pause]. Are you sure it's me? [Pause.] You're not sure are you? [Pause.] It could be somebody else. It could have been what's-his-name. Chuck. [Pause.]

PATSY. Well, it was somebody! [Pause.] Oh, God.

WALTER. I don't know what you want from me.

PATSY. I'll tell your precious Cora what you're like. Then we'll see how high and mighty you think you are. No, you wouldn't like that very much, would you?

*A street in town: the JUDGE, PECK, the TRUCKER, and JOSH in a group.
They speak with deliberation.*

JUDGE. The oats was late 'cause of the spring was so wet.

PECK. Me and the boy couldn't plant till late May. Eighteenth of May. Up till then the ground was so wet we couldn't get at the field even.

TRUCKER. And then that cold spell.

JUDGE. Ground was solid out our way till almost April.

JOSH. Hell it was.

JUDGE. Almost April. You couldn't stick a fork into it. Hard as a rock.

PECK. 'Course you're high; it wasn't near so bad along in the valley.

TRUCKER. Oh, no. It wasn't near.

PECK. Along the valley there I don't imagine there was more than six-ten cold days. Days it was froze solid. River wasn't more than three inches ice.

JOSH. I don't believe it ever froze clear across.

PECK. No, it never froze across.

JOSH. There was some running out aways right through the winter.

PECK. 'Course you're up on the hill there. You're not protected.

TRUCKER. Yeah, it was froze solid right up through April.

JUDGE. 'Course the rains was bad for you. In the valley there.

JOSH. Oh, yeah.

TRUCKER. I don't believe I've ever seen the rains so bad.

PECK. Yeah, the river swelled up there along in March, I can't remember it that bad before. I said to Josh, I couldn't remember it that bad. There was that.

JOSH. Most of the field was under six-ten feet of water along in the spring.

PECK. April it was.

JOSH. Yeah, I believe it was April.

PECK. Wasn't able to set a plow till late in the month. Plowed for the oats finally in May. Eighteenth of May; that's the latest I can remember. I believe it was the eighteenth.

JOSH. It was, I remember.

PECK. Latest I remember.

JUDGE. Well, you're in the valley there; you're not protected.

TRUCKER. The floods was bad for you.

PECK. Yeah, I'll say. It's rich soil, though. Good bottom topsoil.

TRUCKER. Yeah, it's rich bottom land.

PECK. It's good bottom land.

TRUCKER. It's good for corn.

PECK. Oh, yeah.

JUDGE. It's sandy for oats though.

JOSH. Yeah, the oats idn't doing well.

TRUCKER. Well, it's been dry the past month.

PECK. Radio says we might be heading for a drought.

JUDGE. I been thinking I might have to irrigate. Later on. If it doesn't get wetter.

JOSH. Yeah, we had all our rains right there together.

TRUCKER. Not what you'd call a deep rain though.

JUDGE. No, it run right off, much as there was of it. Could sure use some of it now.

PECK. Oh, yeah.

JUDGE. The corn's beginning to curl; I noticed this morning.

Josh leaves, goes to LENA's porch.

TRUCKER. It was dry this morning. Almost no dew even.

PECK. There wasn't much even low like I am. Course you're up on the hill. You must be getting the worst of it.

JOSH [to LENA]. Just got off work.

LENA. You look it; you didn't even wash up.

JOSH. I did, but it'll have to wear off; it's ground right in, I think.

LENA. Where did you want to go tonight?

JOSH. You mind eating up at Cora's or you want to go into Centerville?

LENA. It doesn't matter, whatever you want.

JOSH. We might as well go on into town to the drive-in.

LENA. Oh lets, 'cause Patsy'll be there and I wanted to see her.

JOSH. You've seen her this morning.

LENA. Yes, but she said she had a surprise she wanted to tell me.

JOSH. I don't know what she thinks is a surprise. Then we'll go into the movies, all right? Or would you rather just drive?

LENA. I'd kinda like to see the picture.

JOSH. Whatever you want.

LENA [going to PATSY]. She's gonna be with Chuck so you be nice to him.

PATSY. Don't you think he's cute, though?

LENA. I guess.

PATSY. Was he really at the drive-in with her? That's so funny. His name's Walter I found out. But I can't imagine. That's the funniest thing; I just wish I'd have seen it.

LENA. It's not so bad.

PATSY. But, she's so old for him. My God, she's thirty-eight.

LENA. She isn't, is she? Mama said thirty-four.

PATSY. Well, she's older than any thirty-four, and besides that's bad enough.

LENA. That soldier you went out with last year was that old.

PATSY. He was not.

LENA. I'll bet he was. He was balding.

PATSY. He was not, what do you think I am, he had a crew cut; besides he was twenty-six, I saw his ID.

LENA. Oh, he wasn't any twenty-six.

PATSY. I saw his draft card, Lena. Besides, my God, it's different with a boy. He was very nice. Besides, I only went out with him twice. I felt sorry for him. We didn't do anything.

On Eva's porch.

CORA. That's hard for me to believe, Eva.

EVA. You ask Robert; what difference does it make?

CORA. 'Cause he worked for me; he used to pick up the garbage for his hogs. He lived out back of the café for years, till they burned that shack down. I still say it was Driver Junior's brother and Josh did it, burned that shack down.

EVA. We come into the clearing back behind Nelly Windrod's house, by her mill there, and I heard something, and he said he'd show me what.

CORA. Skelly did? He did not.

EVA. No. He didn't say.

CORA. Eva if that's not the truth, you better say how it really happened.

EVA. I said it happened like Robert said. It's like that and I don't care if you knew him or not. Mama said the preacher said a sermon about the evil in people like him and that we should have killed him or something before he had a chance to take advantage of me. I've been cursed and scarred.

CORA. You can't lie under oath, Eva.

EVA [running away]. You're the one who's going to hell. Not me. I didn't do it, anyway; Nelly did it.

In the café.

CORA. It wasn't Skelly.

TRUCKER [leaving café]. Well, who do you think it was?

CORA. She told me.

TRUCKER. If he hadn't of died, I know he wouldn't have seen the light of day the next morning. [Goes to JOSH.]

A street in town.

JOSH [almost good-naturedly]. Damn that mutt anyway.

TRUCKER. Good watchdog, is he?

JOSH. That old bitch of a dog, I'll kill that bitch.

TRUCKER. Wakes up the folks does he?

JOSH. Every damn time we drive up it starts up a racket. Son of a bitch, every light in the house goes on. She has to run on in, the noise that dog raises, every goddamned night. I don't care how easy I drive up. We started parking on down the block, she still starts up as soon as Lena steps a foot on the porch.

On MARTHA's porch.

MARTHA. When I think of the evil in this world.

WILMA. To do some bestial thing like that.

In town.

PECK [to the TRUCKER and the JUDGE]. Well, I never figured him to actually hurt anybody.

TRUCKER. Hell, we all knew he was loony.

JUDGE. Someone like that—we all knew he was capable of any kind of thing.

PECK. Capable, yes, but I never figgered him for actually hurting anybody.

TRUCKER. Well, when somebody lives like that—away from everybody.

PECK. The boys give him a hard time but he can take care of himself.

TRUCKER. Should have been put away the way he looks at everybody.

JUDGE. Should have been shot—just shot in the woods; nobody the wiser.

PECK. I just never really figgered him to do anything. Capable, yes, but I have to admit I'd never thought he'd do anything. Outright, I mean.

MARTHA [on her porch]. Why, she called Evelyn Jackson a liar to her face, and Eva too. Swore things, the devil and his angels wouldn't believe it. She'd stand up there and swear black was white.

MARY [in her house, upstairs]. Nelly, Nelly, there's someone out back, honey, having a terrible fight; they came through the woods and started yelling all kinds of things.

NELLY [as she exits to a street in town]. Where was you? I thought you was in bed.

MARY. You better go out and see, honey.

MAVIS. Morning.

NELLY. Good morning.

MAVIS. We don't see you to talk to much.

NELLY. Well, summer is a slow time; I've been saving up strength for Peck's corn crop this year.

MAVIS. It's sure looking good.

NELLY. I drive past; I've been keeping my eye on it.

MAVIS. How is the mill?

NELLY. Well, summer is slow.

MAVIS. We see you drive by.

NELLY. Evenings I've been going into Centerville; talking to the farmers over there; say we might be into a drought.

MAVIS. We saw you, I believe going into the movie house there.

NELLY. Yes, I don't get a chance to go often.

MAVIS. Well, we don't go.

NELLY. I've seen the girl there.

MAVIS. Patsy? Oh, yes, Patsy enjoys it. She goes with Chuck; awfully nice boy; I guess you know we're planning a wedding; I said it wasn't any use having a church wedding, all amounts to the same —Patsy wouldn't hear of it, of course, so I suppose we're going all out.

NELLY. He's an awfully nice boy, I hear.

MAVIS. Do you? I'm glad to hear it; we hardly know them really, but he does seem sweet; his family has a lovely farm, we visited. Last Sunday. They grow up so fast.

NELLY. Quite a nice young lady.

MAVIS. We're proud of her. How's your mother?

NELLY. Oh, Mom's the same; her mind's gone. I hate to leave her alone nights. Just like a child.

MAVIS. Well, you have a life of your own; you have to get out.

NELLY. Yes, I do. I hate to leave her, though, just the same.

MAVIS. We see you driving into Centerville.

NELLY. It's good to get away from the mill; Duane nearly runs it for me now.

MAVIS. I was talking to your mother; poor thing.

NELLY. Yes, it's sad.

MAVIS. I remember she had a fine mind.

NELLY. Yes, she did. One of the first registered nurses in Des Moines. Long time ago now; when she was a girl.

MAVIS. She goes on terrible about you; poor thing.

NELLY. I know, she doesn't know what she's saying half the time.

MAVIS. Still she tells things; it must be terrible for you.

NELLY. I'll take care of her, Mavis, as long as my strength holds out.

MAVIS. Martha Truit said, the life you have to bear.

NELLY. It's my cross, Mavis.

MAVIS. I know, I told Peck . . .

NELLY. How is Peck?

MAVIS. Oh, he's all right; his back is giving him trouble again. It's just nerves I keep telling him, but I don't know. Between you and me I don't know.

On MARTHA's porch.

WILMA. Who knows what's in somebody's mind like that.

MARTHA. Like that time—when was it, last summer.

The people have wandered to random, scattered positions about the stage. They stand still and isolated, ROBERT and EVA moving about them as though walking through the woods.

EVA. No, in the wintertime and in the autumn. It's so nice, it smells so clean.

ROBERT. Okay, the fall then.

EVA. Yes. And it's heavy, heavy frost and it covers everything and that's rime.

ROBERT. And it's just frost? Is it a hoarfrost?

EVA. That's it, hoarfrost is rime. And it covers everything. Every little blade of grass and every tree and houses and everything. Like it's been dipped in water and then in sugar.

ROBERT. Or salt. Yeah, I know what it is.

EVA. It's better than ice storms or anything like that. And every-

thing is white and sparkling so clean when the sun comes up it nearly blinds you and it's rare! It doesn't happen every year. And that's what I'd like to be. What I'd like to do. I have a book with a picture of Jack Frost painting rime on a windowpane with a paintbrush. Do you fly? Do you dream you fly?

ROBERT. When?

EVA. Ever?

ROBERT. I guess. I haven't thought about it.

EVA. How high? Think about it. It's important. Everybody flies, it's important how high.

ROBERT. I don't know. Just over the ground.

EVA. Really?

ROBERT. I guess. As high as my head. I'm always getting tangled up in wires and all.

EVA. I'm way over the treetops, just over the treetops, just brushing against the treetops, and I fly right over them, just brush them with my arms out. Over the whole town like an airplane. Spreading this salt frost in the autumn. I love autumn. And when the sun comes up—

ROBERT. Right.

EVA. It'll blind you!

ROBERT. I've seen it.

EVA. It's so bright it blinds you. I want to fly like that, all over the town, right over everybody. It's beautiful. [SKELLY takes a step forward, among the silent people.] Listen! Listen. Did you hear something?

The people move from their still positions into small groups. SKELLY comes to CORA and WALTER.

CORA. Are you out there?

SKELLY. Here. Yeah.

CORA. Can Walter help you? You know Walter.

SKELLY. Yeah, I know.

CORA. We're gonna be turning in, but he can help you with it.

SKELLY. The white one, with the spots?!

CORA. Spotty?

SKELLY. Had a litter.

CORA. She did?

SKELLY. She had four but she ate one.

CORA. Skelly, you just let them go wild, that's terrible; you should take them away from her.

SKELLY. The runt, the last one.

WALTER. She what? She ate one of them?

CORA. Pigs do that sometimes; they're terrible. A runt or something that they think is weak, they will.

WALTER. Couldn't you stop her?

SKELLY. I didn't see it.

CORA. Oh, he lets them just go wild, you can't get near them; one of them's all right, the brown one.

SKELLY. She's good.

CORA. One of them is tame and nice, the rest you can't get near them. He has four. So that makes seven now, doesn't it? You're getting to be a regular rancher.

SKELLY. The brown's a good one.

CORA. He has an old hound dog he keeps too; he's good with them but they just run wild. [She leaves.]

WALTER. You want me to help you?

SKELLY. I'm all right. You like her?

WALTER. Do I like? What? Who?

SKELLY. Jackson. [Pause.] That Patsy Jackson. Cora ain't good to you?

WALTER. Cora? I imagine she's good to everybody.

SKELLY. But you. She's good to you. I seen you with Patsy Jackson. You like her? You like that carrying on?

WALTER. What? I thought you were talking about your brown sow; I've not seen her.

SKELLY. I said, if you think you're a big man and you play around here and you play around there.

WALTER. You want me to help you slop the hogs?

SKELLY. I'll be all right.

WALTER. Well, if you make it your business to know what everybody is doing, I see why Cora makes sure we pull down the shades at night, and turn off the light and listen to hear if anyone's

about. If that's your business, I guess I don't have to tell you what Patsy Jackson is like.

SKELLY. She's a bitch.

WALTER. Patsy? And them that lies down with . . .

SKELLY. Cora's a good woman.

WALTER. Yes, well, you slop the hogs and carry off the garbage and I build the fence and paint the café; we're none of us freeloaders, I don't suppose. I don't imagine I owe anyone anything except money. I don't owe anybody time. I can't say that I see it as any of your business anyway, Skelly. You don't have to worry about her; she's managed seven years without you or me either. Don't you think? [Pause.] Wouldn't you say? [Pause.] You go on and slop your hogs. [Pause.] Go on, get on, be thankful she gives it to you for the price of carrying it away. [Pause.] Hey. What do you do with those hogs anyway? How come they're so wild? [Pause.]

SKELLY. I feed 'em, they run wild.

WALTER. Go on, I didn't mean anything by it. Good night.

MARY [to MAVIS]. I have a bruise there on the inside of my elbow, she holds onto me there, she pushes at me terrible, she can't help it.

A street in town.

EVA. If you had a car, you could drive all over.

ROBERT. What do I want with a car?

EVA. Are you afraid?

ROBERT. What for? So I can drive around the square. Around the square, around the square. It's all they ever do; all the boys with cars. Around the square and over into Centerville to a drive-in to eat and a drive-in to see a movie.

EVA. You just don't want to be like——

ROBERT. Everybody doesn't have to have a car. Everybody talks like that's all there is. The guys at school spend their whole lives in or on top of or under their cars. They eat in them and sleep in them and change clothes and drink and get sick and vomit and make out with their girls—it's all they even ever talk about. Evolution's gonna take their feet right away from them. Make turtles with wheels for legs out of them.

EVA. I think you're just afraid 'cause of Driver.

ROBERT. Well, that's another thing I hadn't thought of. They die in them too. Live and die without ever stepping outside. Why would I want that?

LENA [offstage]. Sometimes I think life is so short and we should enjoy it for the time we're here and then I think I should work really hard so I can be comfortable, you know, after I've made some money, and then I think how awful working all that time would be and most of my life would be gone by that time and I'd have wasted it, you know what I mean? No, no, don't, Josh!

JOSH [offstage, to LENA]. You said you would.

LENA. Sometime, I said.

JOSH. You don't want to?

LENA. It isn't that. You know. Don't now!

JOSH. What?

LENA. You know. If something happens, you don't know what can happen. And there's no assurance—of what can happen.

JOSH. Nothing can happen, I told you.

LENA. Come on. Don't now! I'm not kidding now.

JOSH. Just see.

LENA. You don't like me really or you'd respect me.

JOSH. What? I don't like you? Why do you think I want to?

LENA. You know what I mean.

JOSH. Just see. Just see. Just see. Nothing will happen; just see.

LENA. No, I said, now. Come on.

JOSH. Jesus Christ, Lena.

LENA. Well, don't be mad.

JOSH. Well, you let me go so far and then say no, I don't know what you expect.

LENA. It's all right, isn't it? Josh? Well, don't just sit there. I said sometime. Sometime, really. I mean it. Just not tonight. Okay? I want to, too; I just said not tonight. Really. It just scares me. Okay? Okay? [Pause. Then rapidly.] Josh! Damn it, now, come on. No! I said and that means no! Good Lord. [Sound of someone being slapped. Pause.] Now you're mad, aren't you?

PREACHER [to CONGREGATION]. No, sir, it is the soul and responsi-

bility of our very community. The laxity with which we met the obligations of our Christian lives. The blindness from which we allowed evil in our lives. We watched it fester and grow; we allowed this dreadful thing to happen through shirking our Christian duty. Nelly Windrod is not on trial here today. That man, may the Lord have mercy on his soul damned eternally to hell, and our blindness to His way. It is our responsibility and we must share that terrible knowledge. As you go your ways tonight. As you leave and walk and drive to your homes, realize that the burden must be ours and ask the Lord for his grace. Pray for these two souls as you pray for the lost, the outcast, as you pray for the soul of the damned, and the care of our boys overseas; Pray to the Lord to unlock the bitterness in the hearts of those like him in the world today and pray that they may see the light of His holy way.

CONGREGATION. Amen.

PREACHER. Amen, the Lord be with you.

The CONGREGATION walks slowly, as if coming from church, to the positions of the woods.

JOSH. Had the Olds out last night.

TRUCKER. The old man's Olds?

JOSH. Took it out onto the Old Sparta Road and opened it up.

TRUCKER. Gene was out there last week.

JOSH. Pegged it. Hundred twenty. That old needle was bouncing against the peg and half the way back again. Two miles or over, then I eased it down.

TRUCKER. We'll have to take 'em out Sunday.

In the woods—precisely as before, a rerun.

EVA. And it covers everything and that's rime.

ROBERT. And it's just frost? Is it a hoarfrost?

EVA. That's it, hoarfrost is rime. And it covers everything. Every little blade of grass and every tree and houses and everything. Like it's been dipped in water and then in sugar.

ROBERT. Or salt. Yeah, I know what it is.

EVA. It's better than ice storms or anything like that. And everything is white and sparkling so clean when the sun comes up it nearly blinds you and it's rare! It doesn't happen every year. And

that's what I'd like to be. What I'd like to do. I have a book with a picture of Jack Frost painting rime on a windowpane with a paintbrush. Do you fly? Do you dream you fly?

ROBERT. When?

EVA. Ever?

ROBERT. I guess. I haven't thought about it.

They walk about the forest, walking slowly through the people.

EVA. How high? Think about it. It's important. Everybody flies, it's important how high.

ROBERT. I don't know. Just over the ground.

EVA. Really?

ROBERT. I guess. As high as my head. I'm always getting tangled up in wires and all.

EVA. I'm way over the treetops, just over the treetops, just brushing against the treetops, and I fly right over them, just brush them with my arms out. Over the whole town like an airplane. Spreading this salt frost in the autumn. I love autumn. And when the sun comes up—

ROBERT. Right.

EVA. It'll blind you!

ROBERT. I've seen it.

EVA. It's so bright it blinds you. I want to fly like that, all over the town, right over everybody. It's beautiful. [SKELLY steps forward.] Listen! Listen. Did you hear something?

ROBERT. No. What?

EVA. Like something rustling in the leaves?

ROBERT. No. What? It was probably a rabbit.

SKELLY steps forward again.

EVA. Listen.

ROBERT. I don't hear anything.

EVA. Maybe it was the wind.

ROBERT. There isn't any; maybe it was a fox.

EVA. Don't.

ROBERT. Or a wolf.

EVA. Ted Caffey trapped a wolf in his barn last year.

ROBERT. Shot its head off too.

EVA. Oh, he did not—are you trying to scare me?—it got away.

ROBERT. Shot it and killed it; took its pelt into the county agent in Centerville and got twenty dollars for it.

EVA. It wasn't anything; we better get back.

ROBERT. It was probably the mate looking for the one Caffey shot.

EVA. Don't say that, it wasn't— [SKELLY moves again.] Listen!

ROBERT. It wasn't anything.

They stop still.

WALTER [*turning from his tree position*]. What's that junk heap of a what was it a Plymouth?

CORA. At Church Street? That's Driver's car. Driver Junior's older brother. Drove it in stock car races; over in Centerville they have a track. The whole town went; used to, when he drove. I suppose they think it's bad luck now, he had some kind of accident; smashed it to hell, it looks like, doesn't it?

WALTER. He get killed?

CORA. Oh, yes, killed instantly. They hitched up a chain to the car and pulled it back here.

WALTER. And dumped it in the middle of the street? The grass and weeds almost cover it; I didn't know what it was at first.

CORA. Well, that's where the chain broke and the axle broke and every other damn thing broke, so there it sits. Not a very pretty sight.

They move a few steps.

The following is from all over the stage. The characters may move from their stationary positions for a few steps and return to them. The woods become alive with their voices. The sequence should begin softly and build, becoming faster and more forceful toward the end.

MARY. Rusting away—flaking away.

EVELYN. Falling apart, boarded together, everything flapping and rusting.

MARY. All the buildings bowing and nodding.

PATSY. Movie house been closed down eight years.

TRUCKER. It was dry this morning; almost no dew even.

NELLY. You fall down, you bruise, you run into things, you're old.

PATSY. Tumbleweed blowing down the deserted streets.

MARY. And the flowers dry up and die.

SKELLY. You didn't go to the races to see him kill himself.

EVA. And it covers everything and that's rime.

LENA. I remember his laugh.

CORA. Eldritch is all but a ghost town.

WILMA. The wages of sin—

MARTHA. I don't know, love.

EVA. And when the sun comes up it blinds you!

EVELYN. The mine shaft building used to just shine.

SKELLY. All in the air.

JOSEPH. Just see.

LENA. It's a beautiful church.

WALTER. Wouldn't you say?

MAVIS. A decent person is afraid to move outside at night.

PREACHER. As you go your way tonight.

CORA. You seem uneasy,

EVELYN. The doctor said it was just shock.

PECK. You watch yourself.

MARY. Gone, gone gone.

EVA. Like it's been dipped in water and then in sugar.

MAVIS. And not seen the light of day tomorrow.

MARY. All my children.

EVA. And that's what I want to be.

They are still, trees again.

MARY. Gone, gone gone.

EVA [continuing, *in the woods*]. You know what my mother says?

ROBERT. What?

EVA. When I come in?

ROBERT. What?

EVA. She says you're irresponsible, and she asks me things like where we go and all, everywhere we go every time I go anywhere with you. Everything we do.

ROBERT. Where does she think we go?

EVA. Oh, I tell her we just go walking in the woods; talking. She knows that but she thinks we do other things too.

ROBERT. Like what?

EVA. You know.

ROBERT. Like what?

EVA. You know. Dirty things.

ROBERT. What does she think that for?

EVA. I don't tell her, though.

ROBERT. What would you tell her?

EVA. About that. About when I have to pee and things.

ROBERT. Well, there's nothing dirty about that.

EVA. Well, don't you think I know!

ROBERT. She means other things.

EVA. What?

ROBERT. Never mind.

EVA. Well, don't you think I know? I know. You don't do things like that, you don't even look! I can, though; I know.

ROBERT. You don't know anything.

EVA. I DO TOO! I've seen. You think I'm so young because I'm so little. I'm fourteen; I can have babies already; and I've seen cows do it when they're in heat. But you wouldn't do something like that.

ROBERT. Let's go back.

EVA. Let's do. I know how; I can.

ROBERT. When cows are in heat, that's one cow jumping on another; you don't know anything.

EVA. You're ashamed; you're not old enough to.

ROBERT. You don't know what you're talking about.

EVA. Boys have to be older. But I'll bet your brother could anyway. I might as well because she thinks we do anyway. You're the one who doesn't know anything about it.

ROBERT. I should, just to show you—don't—you don't know what you're talking about.

EVA. What?

ROBERT. Anything. Because you don't know anything about it.

EVA. I do too. You're afraid.

ROBERT. You don't know what you're talking about even.

Their lines begin to overlap.

EVA. Only not here.

ROBERT. Why not? What's wrong with here?

EVA. You have to be in bed, stupid!

ROBERT. If you think you know so much. [Crabbing her.]

EVA [violently]. Let go of me! You leave me alone. I will if I want to.

ROBERT. You want to get it in you so bad! You think I can't.

EVA. Stop it.

ROBERT. You think I won't do it.

EVA. Leave me alone. I'll tell.

ROBERT.. No you won't; you asked for it.

EVA. Leave me alone.

ROBERT [throwing her to the ground]. You think you're so smart; I'll show you. Shut up now, shut up or I'll kill you anyway; you asked for it. [They struggle violently on the ground. Eva saying, "No, stay away, leave me alone," screaming.] You little whore; you think I won't. Stop it.

SKELLY [from the woods, breaking toward them. His lines are simultaneous with the above struggle]. What do you think—leave her alone. Don't hurt her. Robert. Don't hurt her.

[He throws ROBERT off her. Eva screams. SKELLY, seeing NELLY, looks up and runs toward her instinctively.] Help her!

MARY [to NELLY, from upstairs at the Windrod house]. Nelly, Nelly, there's someone out back, honey, having a terrible fight; they came through the woods and started yelling all kinds of things.

NELLY. Where was you? I thought you was in bed.

MARY. You better go out and see, honey.

NELLY takes up a shotgun, throwing open the door.

NELLY. What's going on? Who's there?

As EVA screams, NELLY levels the shotgun at SKELLY's chest and fires first one, then the other, barrel. SKELLY falls, violently spun about by the force of the gun. In production it is important that the blanks for the shotgun be very loud, about half as much power as in actual shots; the powder from the gun smokes the entire stage until the end of the play. The CONGREGATION moves from their stationary position as SKELLY hits the floor. They mill a brief moment. The gun is passed, without much interest from one to the other of the men: JUDGE, JOSH, PECK, and the TRUCKER. The cast assembles at the court, blocking SKELLY from the audience's view.

JUDGE [immediately after the CONGREGATION begins to move]. State your name.

ROBERT [moving into the witness stand]. Robert Conklin.

JUDGE. Do you swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

ROBERT. I do.

JUDGE. There's nothing to be nervous about, Robert. We want you to tell the court, just in your own words, what happened on the night in question. Can you do that?

ROBERT. Yes, I think.

JUDGE. We know this has been a terrible shock to you—

ROBERT.—I'm okay, I think. See—Eva and I were walking. We do quite frequently. Just wandering through the woods, talking. And we noticed that it had begun to get dark so we thought we had better start back—and we were heading back toward the main street, that would be west. And Eva thought she heard something behind us and we listened but we didn't hear it again so I assumed we were hearing things. Or it was our imagination. And it got dark pretty fast. And we were just coming into the clearing right behind the mill. Windrod's mill. And uh, we heard something again and this time we saw something behind the trees and we started running. More as a joke than anything—and then he started running too. And it was Skelly, and I wasn't afraid of him, but I knew he'd never liked my brother, and he started running too. He must have been following us all the time; everybody knows how he spies on people; I guess just as we broke into the clearing—and he came from nowhere. [Crowd reaction.] And he

took us by surprise and he pushed me—he hit me from behind; I don't know if I passed out or not. [Crowd murmur.] He's immensely strong. [Crowd murmur.] And I heard a ringing in my ears and I saw what he was trying to do, and everything went white. And he pushed me.

EVA [*screams as loud as possible*]. AHHHHHHHHHHH! AHHHHHHHHHHH! AHHHHHHHHHHH!

EVELYN. Oh, God, oh God, baby, my baby.

EVA. NO! no, no, no, no, no.

EVELYN. See her crippled body. See her broken back; why? Why has God cursed me with this burden? I don't complain, I ask why? We love Him. We bless Him. Praise Him.

Everyone freezes. Tableau. Silence.

PATSY [off]. You know I saw you the day you first came into town, I'll bet. I've seen you a lot. Up at the Hilltop. I told Lena I liked you. No, no, come on. Yes, it's all right; I want you to. You know I do.

WALTER [off]. I've got nothing with me.

PATSY [off]. I know, it doesn't matter. You wouldn't wash your feet with your socks on. Be easy. Did you know I'd watched you? Huh? Did you? Huh? Did you know I had?

WALTER [off]. No. I've seen you a couple of times.

PATSY [off]. I told Lena I liked you. I don't like any of the boys here; they're terrible, shiftless; oh, they're all right. But nobody wants to spend their life here; not here in this place rotting away. Walter! Your name's Walter, isn't it? I found out. Oh. Oh, I love you, Walter. I do. I really do. I love you. Oh, I do. Really. Did you know that? I have since I saw you that first time. I do. I really do. I love you so much. I love you, oh, I do, I love you. I do. Oh, I love you, Walter. You're the only one I love; I do. Really, I do.

Pause. Silence. The people mill gently, leave the stage slowly, silently, a few at a time. SKELLY lies on stage where he fell.

Curtain.

DAYS AHEAD

A Monologue